SHARAN KAUR

Sharni was going as a newly-wed bride to her husband's home when she was kidnapped by dacoits. Her husband, Bhimsen, fled in terror and went to Maharaja Ranjit's Singh's general, Hari Singh Nalwa, for help.

Sharni was saved but she did not want to return to her life in the village. Instead, she asked to join Nalwa's Sikh company. She was inducted as Sharan Kaur.

Sharan Kaur impressed Hari Singh with her intelligence and courage and he trained her as a spy.

The story of Sharan Kaur is taken from Bhai Vir Singh's novel about a woman spy in eighteenth-century Punjab.

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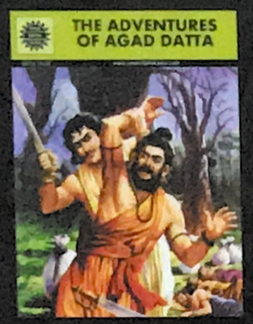

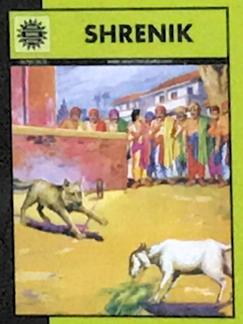

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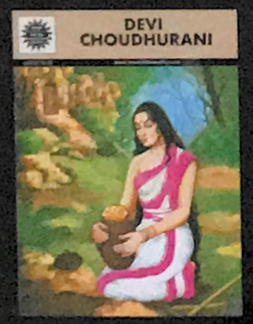

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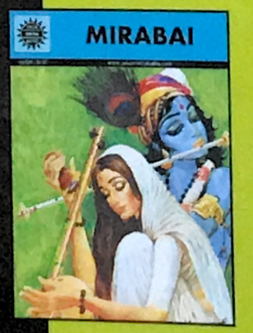

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FABLES & HUMOUR

AMAR CHITRA KATHA

SHARAN KAUR

THE SELFLESS SPY

Vol 811 | ₹ 50

SHARAN KAUR

FORT JAMROD, ON THE NORTH-WEST FRONTIER OF OUR COUNTRY, WAS UNDER CONSTRUCTION. IT WAS BEING BUILT UNDER THE SUPER-VISION OF SARDAR HARI SINGH NALWA, WHO HAD BEEN SENT FROM LAHORE BY MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH TO SUBDUE THE REBELS OF THAT REGION.

TWENTY-FIVE MILES NORTH OF JAMROD LIVED SHARNI, THE SIXTEEN-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER OF A HINDU SHOPKEEPER. ONE DAY —

SHARNI, YOU WILL BE MARRIED NEXT WEEK. REMEMBER! A WOMAN'S HONOUR IS HER MOST VALUABLE POSSESSION. GUARD IT WITH YOUR LIFE.

I WILL NEVER FORGET YOUR WORDS, MOTHER.

A WEEK LATER—

I WILL SOON HAVE TO LEAVE ALL OF YOU AND GO AWAY.

HE'S COME!

THE BRIDEGROOM, BHIMSEN, WAS THE ONLY SON OF VEERBHAN, A RICH BUSINESSMAN.

AFTER THE WEDDING—

MUST YOU LEAVE SO SOON?

YES, MOTHER. WE MUST REACH OUR VILLAGE BEFORE NIGHTFALL. THE ROUTE IS INFESTED WITH DACOITS.

A FEW HOURS LATER, AS THE BRIDAL PROCESSION WENDED ITS WAY THROUGH A NARROW JUNGLE PATH—

SURRENDER OR DIE!

DACOITS! RUN!

VEERBHAN, BHIMSEN AND THE MEN ESCAPED.

COWARDS! THEY'VE RUN AWAY.

LET THEM GO. WE HAVE THE BOOTY...

...AND THE WOMAN IN THE PALANQUIN.

THEY DRAGGED SHARNI OUT OF THE PALANQUIN.

A BRIDE! THE CHIEF WOULD LOVE TO HAVE HER IN HIS HAREM.

MOTHER! MOTHER!

MEANWHILE, AFTER RUNNING FOR ABOUT TWO AND A HALF MILES, VEERBHAN AND THE OTHERS HAD REACHED A WATERFALL, WHERE THEY SAT DOWN TO REST AND TALK.

WE CANNOT RETURN TO OUR VILLAGE WITHOUT THE BRIDE. IT WOULD BE A DISGRACE.

NOR CAN WE GO BACK TO HER VILLAGE. WHAT WOULD I SAY TO HER PARENTS?

AN ELDERLY RELATIVE HAD AN IDEA.

WHY DON'T WE GO TO JAMROD AND SEEK SARDAR NALWA'S HELP?

YES, UNCLE. WHY DON'T WE? THEY SAY HE IS A CHAMPION OF THE OPPRESSED.

VEERBHAN AGREED AND THE PARTY ARRIVED AT JAMROD LATE THAT NIGHT.

MAY WE SEE SARDAR NALWA?

WHY DO YOU WANT TO SEE HIM AT THIS HOUR?

WE CAN'T WAIT TILL MORNING. DACOITS HAVE LOOTED ME AND ABDUCTED MY DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.

THEN THE SARDAR WILL SEE YOU IMMEDIATELY.

THE SENTRY LED THEM TO NALWA. AFTER VEERBHAN HAD TOLD HIS TALE —

THERE WERE SO MANY OF YOU AND YOU COULD NOT PROTECT HER!

SIR, DACOITS ARE MERCILESS AND...

SO YOU LEAVE A HELPLESS GIRL TO THEIR MERCY! COWARDS! MEN LIKE YOU ARE A BURDEN ON SOCIETY AND A DISGRACE TO YOUR COMMUNITY.

NALWA TURNED TO ONE OF HIS OFFICERS.

GO, PAHARA SINGH. RESCUE THE POOR GIRL.

MEANWHILE, THE DACOITS HAD REACHED THEIR HIDEOUT. THEY STOOD BEFORE THEIR CHIEF.

SIR, WE HAVE A PRESENT FOR YOU.

WHAT IS IT MY BOY?

THE DACOIT WENT OUT AND RETURNED WITH A STRUGGLING SHARNI.

A YOUNG BRIDE; A RICH HAUL OF MONEY; AND JEWELRY.

SEND THE GOLD TO THE TREASURY. I'LL KEEP THE BRIDE.

THE CHIEF TURNED TO A SLAVE GIRL.

GIVE THIS BASHFUL BRIDE A SPECIAL ROOM. I'LL SEE HER LATER.

AS YOU COMMAND, SIR.

LATER, WHEN THE DACOIT CHIEF CAME TO SHARNI'S ROOM, HE WAS SO DRUNK HE COULD BARELY STAND.

I WILL MAKE YOU MY BEGUM, MY BEAUTY!

MY HONOUR IS MY MOST PRECIOUS POSSESSION. I MUST GUARD IT WITH MY LIFE, IF NEED BE.

DON'T TOUCH ME. I'LL KILL YOU.

THE CHIEF, AMUSED BY HER VEHEMENCE, SWAYED TOWARDS HER.

HA, HA, HA! HA, HA!

SHARNI PUSHED HIM AWAY WITH ALL HER MIGHT.

DEAD DRUNK, THE DACOIT CHIEF LOST HIS BALANCE AND FELL.

AS SHARNI RAN OUT INTO THE COURTYARD, PAHARA SINGH AND HIS MEN RODE IN.

YOU MUST BE SHARNI. I HAVE COME TO RESCUE YOU. ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

BY GOD'S GRACE NEITHER MY HONOUR NOR I HAVE COME TO ANY HARM, SIR.

PAHARA SINGH DISMOUNTED AND BRANDISHED HIS SWORD.

COME OUT, YOU COWARDS.

WHEN THERE WAS NO RESPONSE, HE TURNED TO HIS MEN.

ENTER THE HOUSE. ROUND UP ALL THE MEN. BUT DON'T TOUCH THE WOMEN.

WHEN ALL THE DACOITS WERE CAUGHT AND HANDCUFFED—

WE WILL TAKE THEM TO JAMROD.

O GOD! YOU ARE GREAT.

AT JAMROD, IN THE COURT OF HARI SINGH NALWA—

YOU ARE SENTENCED TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT.

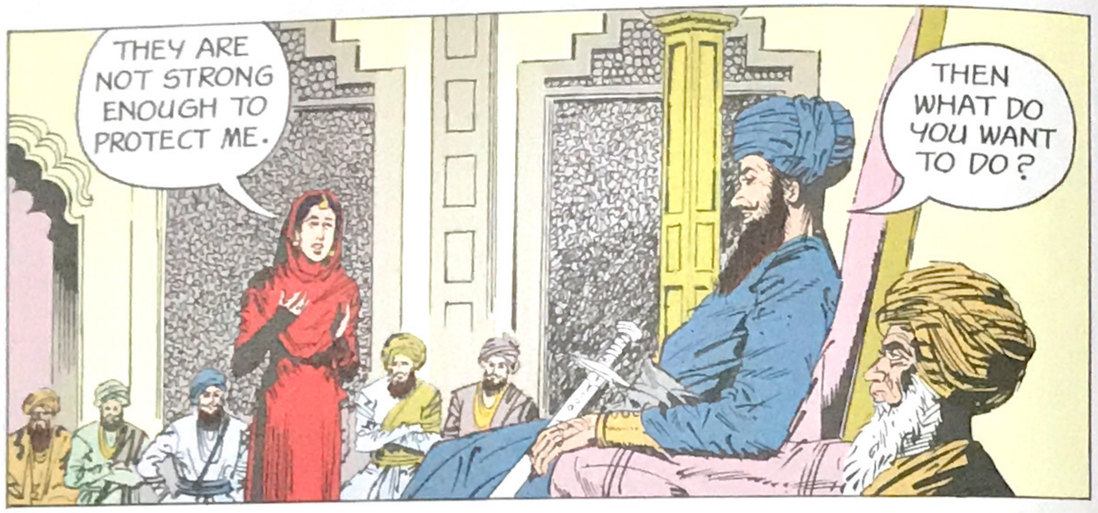
AS NALWA WAS ABOUT TO GET UP—

SIR!

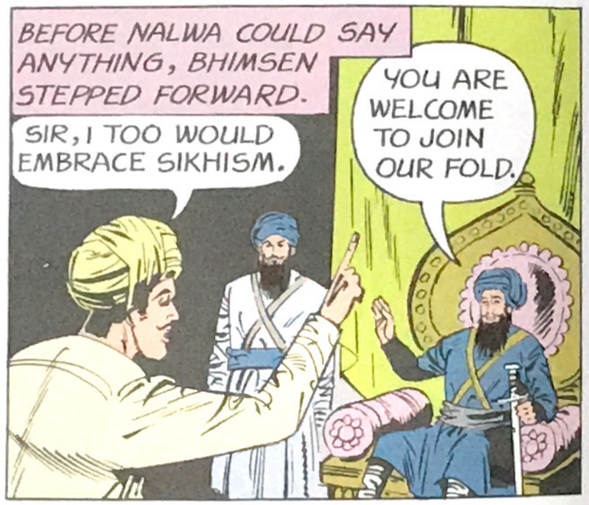
YES, MY DAUGHTER.

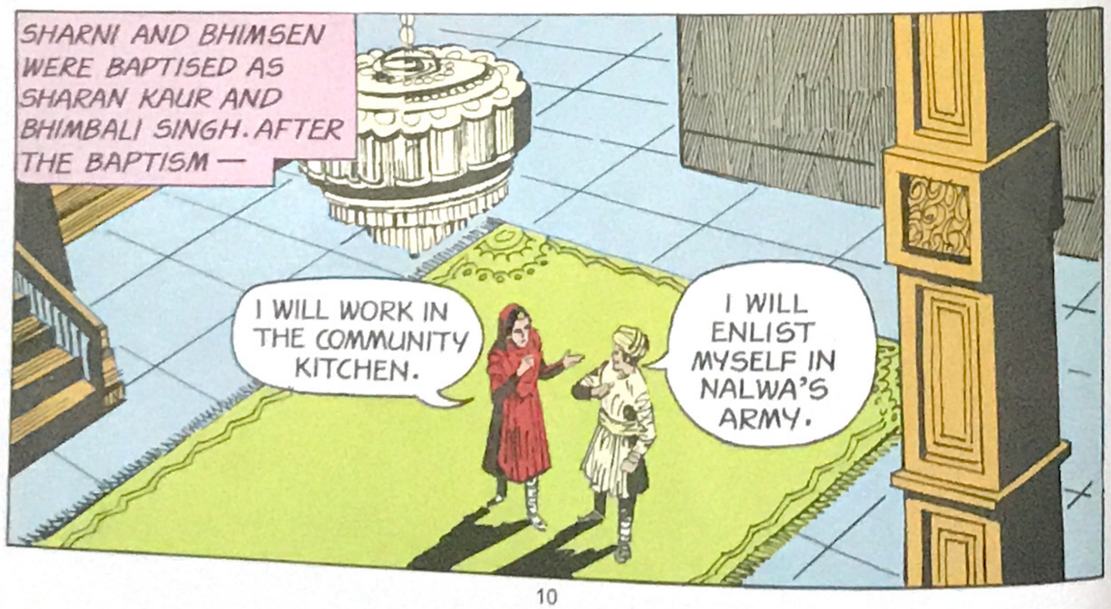
I DO NOT WANT TO RETURN EITHER TO MY PARENTS OR TO MY IN-LAWS.

WHY, MY CHILD?


THEY ARE NOT STRONG ENOUGH TO PROTECT ME.
THEN WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO?

I WANT TO BECOME A SIKH. LET ME STAY HERE WITH YOU AND SERVE YOU.

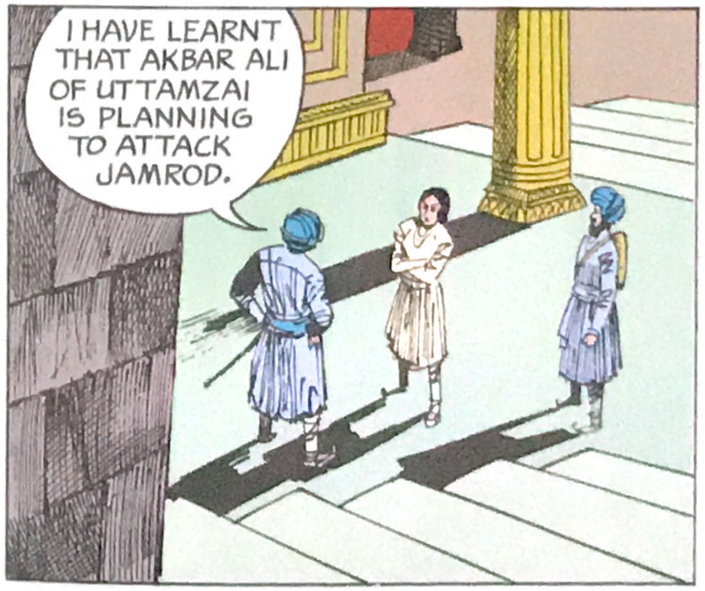

BEFORE NALWA COULD SAY ANYTHING, BHIMSEN STEPPED FORWARD.
SIR, I TOO WOULD EMBRACE SIKHISM.
YOU ARE WELCOME TO JOIN OUR FOLD.

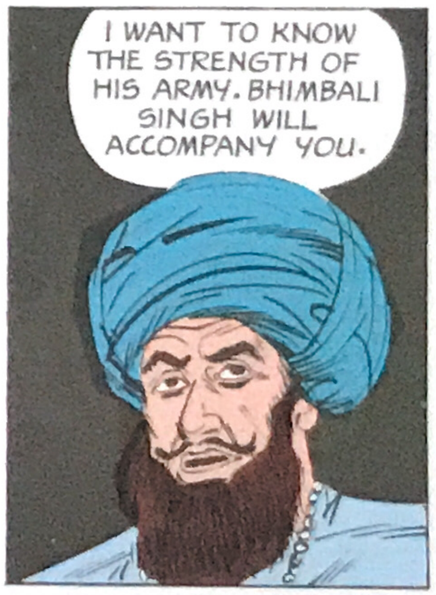

SHARNI AND BHIMSEN WERE BAPTISED AS SHARAN KAUR AND BHIMBALI SINGH. AFTER THE BAPTISM —
I WILL WORK IN THE COMMUNITY KITCHEN.
I WILL ENLIST MYSELF IN NALWA'S ARMY.

NALWA OBSERVED THE COUPLE FOR A FEW DAYS. THEN ONE DAY HE SPOKE TO MAHA SINGH, THE COMMANDER OF HIS ARMY.
SHARAN KAUR IS INTELLIGENT, BRAVE AND TACITURN. I THINK SHE WOULD MAKE AN EXCELLENT SPY. WHY DON'T WE TRAIN HER TO BECOME ONE?
I TOO HAVE NOTICED HER QUALITIES. YES. I'LL TRAIN HER.

AND SO BEGAN SHARAN KAUR'S TRAINING UNDER MAHA SINGH.

A FEW MONTHS LATER, MAHA SINGH SENT FOR HER.
BIBI SHARAN KAUR, YOU ARE NOW A TRAINED SPY. I HAVE A TASK FOR YOU.
I WILL NOT FAIL YOU.


I HAVE LEARNT THAT AKBAR ALI OF UTTAMZAI IS PLANNING TO ATTACK JAMROD.


I WANT TO KNOW THE STRENGTH OF HIS ARMY. BHIMBALI SINGH WILL ACCOMPANY YOU.

THE VERY NEXT DAY SHARAN AND BHIMBALI, DISGUISED AS A PATHAN COUPLE, LEFT ON THEIR MISSION. AFTER THEY HAD COVERED SOME DISTANCE—

SHARAN, WE ARE BEING FOLLOWED.

DON'T PANIC. BE NATURAL.

WHEN THE PATHAN CAME NEARER—

YOUR PARENTS' VILLAGE IS NOT FAR FROM HERE.

WE SHOULD REACH THERE BY DUSK.

WHEN THE PATHAN OVERTOOK THEM, SHARAN KAUR SLACKENED HER PACE.

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

TO UTTAMZAI.

ANY PARTICULAR REASON?

TO VISIT MY IN-LAWS. THEY LIVE THERE.

THE PATHAN LOOKED BACK TO GET A GLIMPSE OF SHARAN'S FACE, THEN TURNED TO BHIMBALI.

I'M FROM UTTAMZAI, TOO. BUT I'VE NEVER SEEN HER BEFORE. WHOSE DAUGHTER IS SHE?

ALAMKHAN'S.

BEFORE THE PATHAN COULD ASK ANY MORE QUESTIONS, SHARAN STABBED HIM.

E..E..AH! YOU ARE SPIES.

BUT YOU WON'T LIVE TO TELL ON US.

BHIMBALI WAS AMAZED.

SHARNO, YOU ARE BRAVE.

I AM A SIKH WOMAN. NOW LET'S GET AWAY BEFORE ANYONE ELSE COMES ON THE SCENE.

THEY WALKED ON IN SILENCE. AT LAST —

THERE IT IS! UTTAMZAI FORT.

WE HAVE REACHED OUR DESTINATION.

YOU WAIT FOR ME BY THAT STREAM. IF I DON'T RETURN BY EVENING, COME INTO THE FORT.

TAKE CARE, SHARNO. GOOD LUCK.

AT THE GATES OF THE FORT—

I WISH TO SEE THE SARDAR.

WHO ARE YOU? WHY DO YOU WANT TO SEE HIM?

MY NAME IS AYESHA. I BELONG TO SALEM VILLAGE. THE SIKHS HAVE MURDERED MY BROTHER.

A VICTIM OF THE SIKHS! THE SARDAR WILL SEE YOU IMMEDIATELY.

WHEN SHARAN REPEATED THE SAME STORY TO AKBAR ALI—

DON'T WEEP, MY CHILD. THE SIKHS WILL SOON BE CHASED OUT OF JAMROD AND PESHWAR.

SHARAN LOOKED UP INNOCENTLY.

HOW CAN THAT HAPPEN, SARDAR? THEY HAVE A HUGE ARMY.

DON'T WORRY. OUR NUMBERS HAVE SWOLLEN. WHEN WE ATTACK, THE SIKHS AT JAMROD WILL BE CAUGHT NAPPING.

AND AKBAR WENT ON TO GIVE HER DETAILS ON THE STRENGTH OF HIS TROOPS.

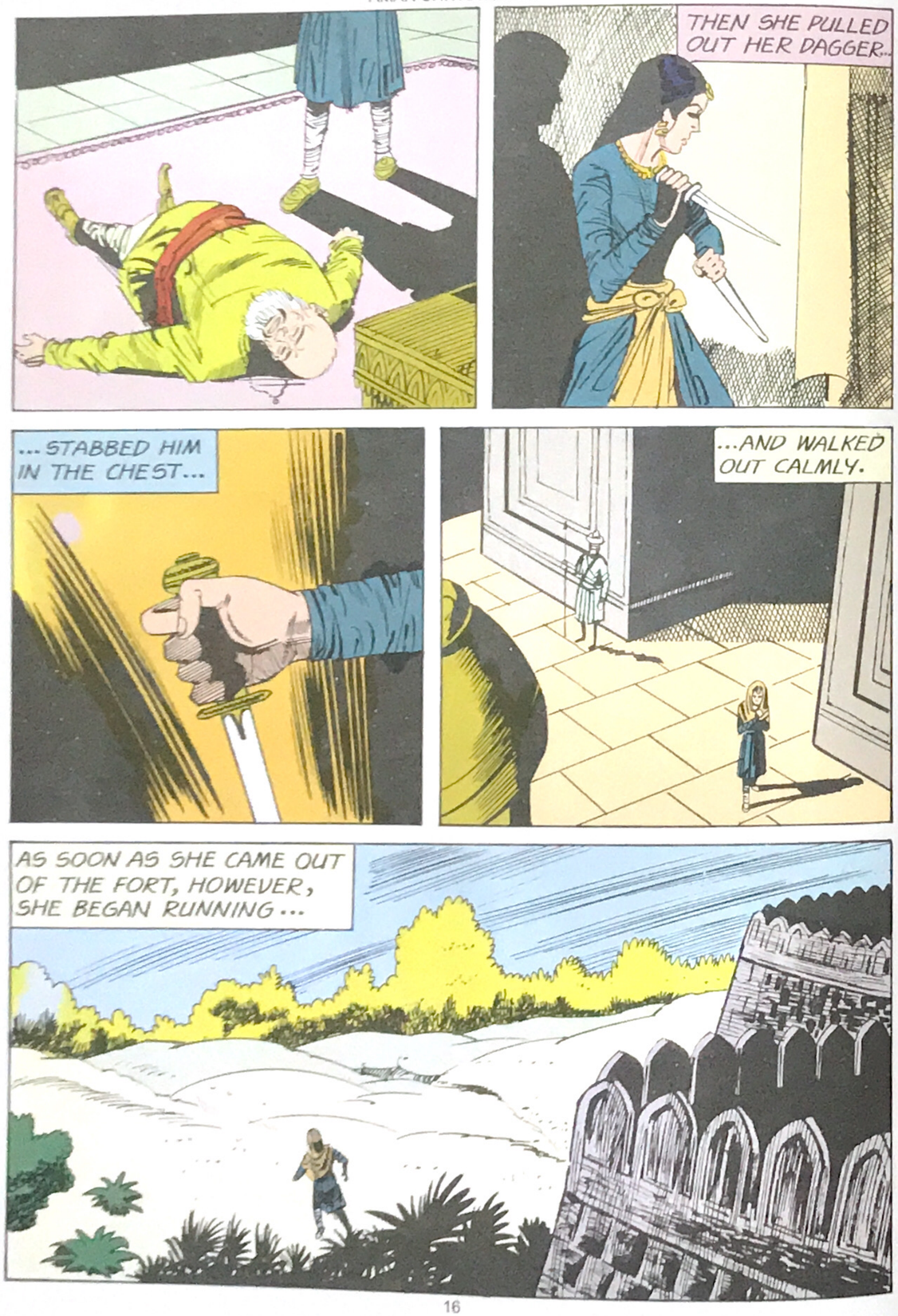
SHARAN SUDDENLY LEANED FORWARD AS IF SHE WERE ABOUT TO FAINT. THE SARDAR ROSE TO SUPPORT HER.

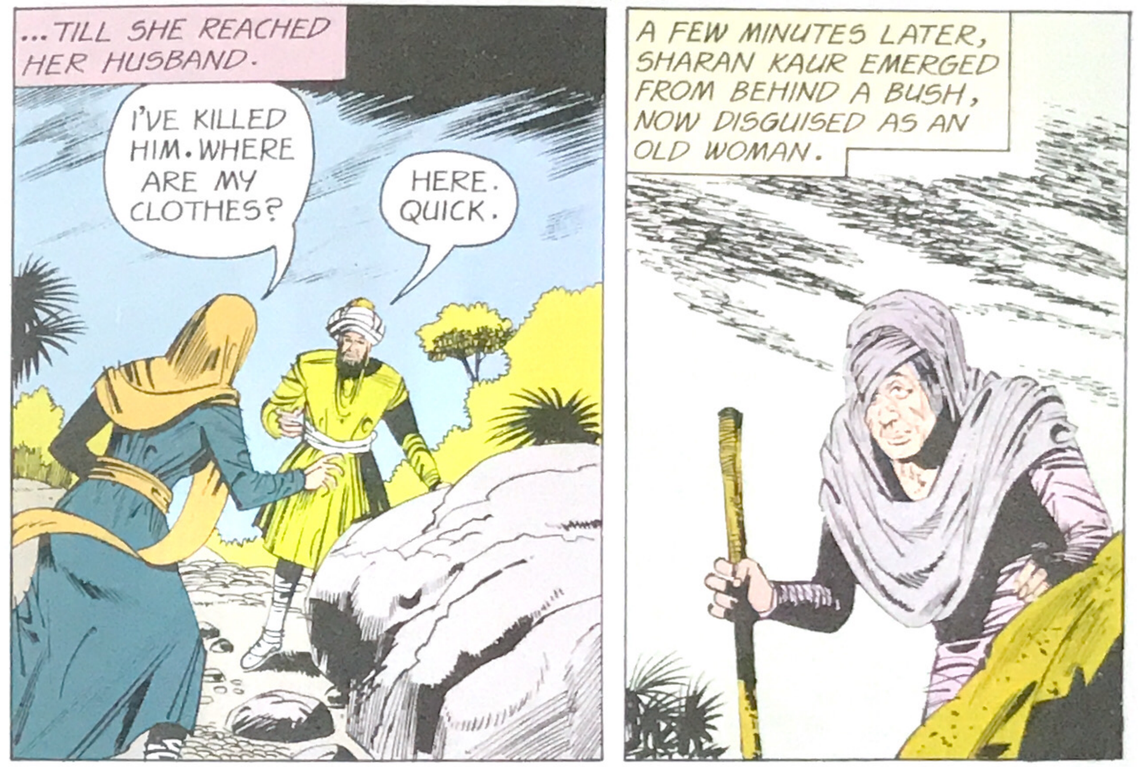
THANK YOU FOR THE INFORMATION.

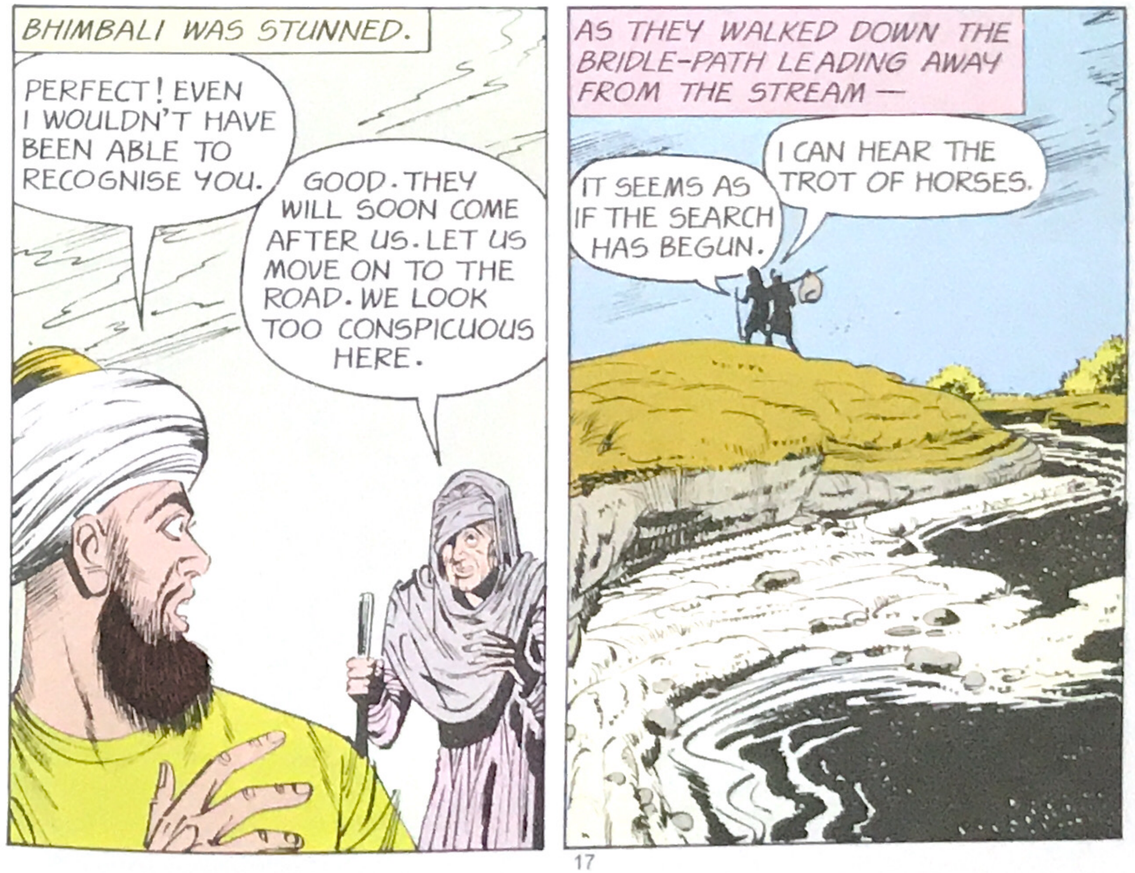
TAKE HEART, MY CHILD. STEADY YOURSELF.

AT THAT MOMENT SHARAN WHIPPED OUT A HANDKERCHIEF AND...

...PRESSED IT TO HIS NOSE.


THEN SHE PULLED OUT HER DAGGER...
...STABBED HIM IN THE CHEST...
...AND WALKED OUT CALMLY.
AS SOON AS SHE CAME OUT OF THE FORT, HOWEVER, SHE BEGAN RUNNING...


...TILL SHE REACHED HER HUSBAND.
I'VE KILLED HIM. WHERE ARE MY CLOTHES?
HERE. QUICK.
A FEW MINUTES LATER, SHARAN KAUR EMERGED FROM BEHIND A BUSH, NOW DISGUISED AS AN OLD WOMAN.


BHIMBALI WAS STUNNED.
PERFECT! EVEN I WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ABLE TO RECOGNISE YOU.
GOOD. THEY WILL SOON COME AFTER US. LET US MOVE ON TO THE ROAD. WE LOOK TOO CONSPICUOUS HERE.
AS THEY WALKED DOWN THE BRIDLE-PATH LEADING AWAY FROM THE STREAM —
IT SEEMS AS IF THE SEARCH HAS BEGUN.
I CAN HEAR THE TROT OF HORSES.

THEY WERE RIGHT. THE PATHANS WERE AFTER THE GIRL WHO HAD KILLED THEIR SARDAR.

THEY'VE COME. DON'T WORRY. WE'LL HANDLE THEM.

HAVE YOU SEEN A YOUNG PATHAN GIRL PASS THIS WAY? SHE HAS MURDERED OUR SARDAR.

WE DID, IN FACT, SEE A GIRL. SHE SEEMED TO BE IN A HURRY. SHE RAN DOWN THAT PATH.

WHEN THE SOLDIERS HAD GALLOPED AWAY TOWARDS THE PATH —

WE'RE SAFE!

LET US WALK BACK TO JAMROD.

A FEW DAYS LATER, THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE FORT WAS COMPLETED. KUNWAR NAUNIHAL SINGH, RANJIT SINGH'S GRANDSON, CAME TO PRESIDE OVER A SPECIAL DARBAR HELD IN HONOUR OF THE OCCASION.

AT THE DARBAR, THOSE WHO HAD SERVED THE SIKH RAJ WITH DISTINCTION WERE AWARDED MEDALS. THE NAMES OF SHARAN KAUR AND BHIMBALI SINGH HEADED THE LIST.

TO BIBI SHARAN KAUR AND BHIMBALI SINGH— THE BEST SPIES OF THE RAJ— A GOLD MEDAL.

LATER—

SARDAR NALWA, YOU AND YOUR MEN HAVE DONE MUCH FOR THE RAJ. I AM PROUD OF YOU. I AM GETTING MARRIED NEXT WEEK AT LAHORE. I WANT ALL OF YOU TO COME TO THE WEDDING.

WE SHALL BE THERE, SARDAR.

AS SOON AS NAUNIHAL LEFT, HOWEVER, NALWA FELL ILL. HE SENT FOR MAHA SINGH.

I WOULD LIKE TO MOVE TO FORT BALAHISSAR FOR TREATMENT. LET THE SOLDIERS GO TO THE WEDDING. YOU STAY BACK WITH A FEW MEN AND TAKE CHARGE OF THE FORT IN MY ABSENCE.

MEANWHILE, THE BRITISH GOT WIND OF THE FACT THAT FORT JAMROD WAS NOT ADEQUATELY MANNED. THEY HELD CONSULTATIONS WITH ONE OF THEIR ALLIES, DOST MOHAMMED, THE RULER OF KABUL.

RANJIT SINGH AND HIS SIKHS HAVE BECOME VERY POWERFUL. SOMETHING MUST BE DONE TO SUBDUE THEM.

DO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS?

NALWA IS ILL AND MOST OF HIS MEN ARE AWAY AT LAHORE. THIS IS THE TIME TO ATTACK FORT JAMROD.

I WILL ATTACK AS SOON AS I RALLY MY MEN.

NEWS OF DOST MOHAMMED'S INTENDED ATTACK REACHED MAHA SINGH.

SEND BIBI SHARAN KAUR TO ME.

WHEN SHARAN KAUR CAME—

I WANT YOU TO CARRY AN URGENT MESSAGE TO FORT BALAHISSAR.

WHAT IS THE MESSAGE, SARDAR?

TELL SARDAR NALWA THAT DOST MOHAMMED IS PLANNING TO ATTACK US.

IS THAT ALL, SARDAR?

THAT IS ALL. AND... YES, YOU WILL HAVE TO GO ALONE. WE NEED YOUR HUSBAND HERE.

I WILL LEAVE IMME— DIATELY, SARDAR.

SHARAN KAUR RODE TO FORT BALAHISSAR AND GAVE NALWA THE MESSAGE.

TELL MAHA SINGH THAT I'M COMING. I MUST RALLY MY MEN.

MEANWHILE, THE PATHANS HAD HEARD RUMOURS THAT AN EXPERT WOMAN SPY HAD TAKEN A MESSAGE TO NALWA FROM JAMROD.

SHE WILL HAVE TO PASS BY THIS RAVINE ON HER WAY BACK. LET US AMBUSH HER.

A FEW HOURS LATER—

A GUNSHOT! WHO COULD HAVE KNOWN ABOUT MY ERRAND?

SHARAN DID NOT HAVE TO WONDER FOR LONG. THE NEXT SHOT HIT HER HORSE.

IT STUMBLED AND FELL, ROLLING HER OVER.

THERE SEEM TO BE ONLY TWO OF THEM!

AS SHE LOOKED UP, SHE SAW TWO MORE STARING AT HER.

THERE SEEM TO BE MORE!

THE FOUR PATHANS PULLED SHARAN TO HER FEET.

SHE'S DANGEROUS. TWO OF YOU HOLD HER ARMS. ONE OF YOU WALK IN FRONT OF HER AND I'LL WALK BEHIND.

IT'S DEATH FOR A SPY. WHY DON'T WE SHOOT HER?

WE CAN'T. THE SARDAR WANTS HER ALIVE.

REALISING THAT IT WAS USELESS TO PLAY THE HELPLESS WOMAN, SHARAN TRIED ANOTHER TACTIC —

SUCH BRAVE PATHANS YOU ARE! FOUR AGAINST ONE AND THAT TOO A WOMAN!

ARE YOU CHALLENGING US?

YES! IF YOU ARE MEN WHY DON'T YOU FIGHT WITH ME?

YOU DON'T STAND A CHANCE AGAINST US.

GIVE ME A SWORD AND FIGHT WITH ME ONE AT A TIME.

ALL RIGHT. FREE HER ARMS AND GIVE HER A SWORD. I'LL FIGHT WITH HER.

THE TWO FENCED TILL THEY WERE EXHAUSTED.

THEN WITH A QUICK MOVE SHARAN TRIPPED HER OPPONENT ...

...AND BEHEADED HIM.

THE PATHAN NEAR HER RAISED HIS GUN ...

...BUT SHARAN KICKED IT AWAY AND ...

...BEHEADED THE THIRD PATHAN WHO TRIED TO ATTACK HER.

MEANWHILE, THE SECOND PATHAN WHO HAD GONE TO RETRIEVE HIS GUN, STEPPED ON A COBRA.

EE--AH--! I'VE BEEN BITTEN BY A SNAKE.

SHARAN NOW FACED THE SURVIVING PATHAN.

WITH HER SKILFUL MOVEMENTS SHE SUCCEEDED IN DRIVING HIM TO THE EDGE OF THE CLIFF.

NOW ONE KICK SHOULD FINISH HIM.

WITH THE IMPACT OF SHARAN'S KICK, THE PATHAN LOST HIS BALANCE.

SHARAN RAN FOR ABOUT HALF A MILE AND THEN SAT DOWN TO REST.

O GOD! YOU ARE MERCIFUL. YOU SAVED ME AGAIN.

IT WAS MORNING WHEN SHARAN TRUDGED WEARILY INTO FORT JAMROD.

SARDAR NALWA WILL BE HERE ANY MOMENT.

THANK GOD! I'VE JUST RECEIVED THE NEWS THAT DOST MOHAMMED IS ON HIS WAY.

THE ARMIES OF NALWA AND DOST MOHAMMED MET OUTSIDE FORT JAMROD.

DOST MOHAMMED WAS DEFEATED BUT AT THE COST OF NALWA'S LIFE.

FOR SHARAN THERE WAS NO TIME EVEN TO MOURN THE DEATH OF HER BENE-FACTOR. MAHA SINGH HAD ANOTHER ERRAND FOR HER.

GO TO LAHORE WITH YOUR HUSBAND AND REQUEST RANJIT SINGH TO SEND US REINFORCEMENTS. DOST MOHAMMED IS BOUND TO ATTACK AGAIN.

IS THAT ALL, SARDAR?

SEE THAT YOU GIVE THE MESSAGE TO HIM PERSONALLY. I DO NOT TRUST VAZIR DHIAN SINGH.

I WILL, SARDAR.

AT LAHORE WHEN SHARAN AND BHIMBALI GAVE RANJIT SINGH THE MESSAGE AND THE NEWS OF NALWA'S DEATH—

I HAVE LOST MY BEST GENERAL.

SIR, THIS IS THE THIRD APPEAL FOR REINFORCE-MENTS. THE OTHER TWO WERE SENT BY SARDAR NALWA.

STRANGE. THE OTHER TWO MESSAGES NEVER REACHED ME. DHIAN SINGH, I SHALL GO PERSONALLY TO JAMROD AND MEET DOST MOHAMMED. GIVE ME THE BEST MEN WE HAVE.

I WILL, SIR.

MAHA SINGH WAS RIGHT. JEALOUSY, DHIAN SINGH HAD INTERCEPTED THE MESSAGES FROM HIS RIVAL, NALWA. HE TURNED TO THE COUPLE.

BHIMBALI, YOU MAY STAY WITH THE OTHER OFFICERS. BIBI SHARAN KAUR WILL STAY WITH MY FAMILY.

LATER, AS SHARAN KAUR RESTED IN HER ROOM, DHIAN SINGH ENTERED WITHOUT EVEN KNOCKING.

YOU TRIED TO TELL ON ME, DIDN'T YOU?

I ONLY DID MY DUTY.

HE ADVANCED MENACINGLY TOWARDS SHARAN.

FOR THAT YOU WILL NOT GO BACK ALIVE.

BEFORE HE COULD SAY ANOTHER WORD, SHARAN LEAPT FORWARD AND PRESSED HER KERCHIEF TO HIS NOSE.

THEN, LEAVING THE UNCONSCIOUS DHIAN SINGH ON THE FLOOR, SHARAN RAN OUT TO RANJIT SINGH'S PALACE.

WEEKS LATER, RANJIT SINGH RETURNED TO LAHORE WITH SHARAN KAUR AND BHIMBALI. DOST MOHAMMED HAD BEEN DEFEATED — HIS ARMY ROUTED.

AT A SPECIAL DURBAR THE GREAT RANJIT SINGH HIMSELF BESTOWED HONOURS ON SHARAN KAUR AND BHIMBALI.

THESE MEDALS ARE FOR YOUR SELFLESS SERVICES AND EXCELLENT ESPIONAGE.

THAT WAS THE MOST GLORIOUS MOMENT IN THE LIFE OF SHARAN KAUR, THE SHY HELPLESS BRIDE WHO HAD BECOME THE BRAVEST WOMAN IN SIKHDOM.